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Miles McAvoy

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Zeno of Citium's Philosophy of Stoicism

Zeno of Citium, the founding philosopher of Ancient Greek Stoicism, has lost most of his story to time, leaving his teachings to live on in only a few fragments of what was rumored to be hundreds of treatises. Faithfully, the majority of Stoicism has survived the ages through the translations of fellow philosophers, Stoic and contemporary alike. Zeno the Stoic was born a Greek citizen of Citium, Cyprus in 335 B.C, son to Mnaseas, a successful merchant of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Little is known of Zeno's childhood, instead his history most commonly begins at the age of thirty, notably transcribed by Diogenes Laërtius within his compendium, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. Zeno is reliably described within as a lean man with thick legs, regarded appropriately as being both flabby and delicate; he was a man of simple pleasures and commonly described as leading an ascetic lifestyle prior even to his philosophical teachings, "they say he was fond of eating green figs and of basking in the sun… [declining] most invitations to dinner" (Laërtius).

Unfortunately, Zeno's tale begins tragically as he arrives in glory of Athens only after narrowly surviving a shipwreck on his voyage between Phoenicia and Peiraeus, Greece. Afterwards Zeno finds himself inside an Athenian bookstore, enchanted by the writings of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, an inspiring telling of the influential philosopher Socrates. Zeno's education prior to this moment is unknown but believed to have not yet embodied such intriguing studies as those of Socrates, and so he pressed the lowly bookkeeper to direct him to a man of such knowledge. Responding in earnest, the librarian pointed him to Crates of Thebes, a scholar

of Cynicism and famous Greek philosopher in his own right. In time Zeno eventually became the pupil of Crates, studying under the Cynic's teachings for many years, his education eventually included attending the Megarian school of Stilpo, studying dialecticians such as Diodorus Cronus, as well as learning of Platonist philosophy under Polemo and Xenocrates over the course of several decades. His respect and desire for philosophy only grew from that point forward, it is said that he did not seamlessly transition to a life of philosophical cynicism though, as Laërtius described him with a tale from Crates' teachings:

> Showing in other respects a strong bent for philosophy, though with too much native modesty to assimilate Cynic shamelessness. Hence Crates, desirous of curing this defect in him, gave him a potful of lentil-soup to carry through the Ceramicus; and when he saw that he was ashamed and tried to keep it out of sight, with a blow of his staff he broke the pot. As Zeno took to flight with the lentil-soup flowing down his legs, "Why run away, my little Phoenician?" quoth Crates, "nothing terrible has befallen you." (Laërtius)

This is only the beginning for Zeno of Citium, as his studies with Crates and the others will only inspire him further upon his noble pursuit of his own philosophical doctrine; in time he will write numerous works on logic, physics, and most famously Stoic ethics. Laërtius summarizes Hecato and Apollonius of Tyre in their first book on Zeno, wherein they regard Zeno's moment of epiphany as "he consulted the oracle to know what he should do to attain the best life, and that the god's response was that he should take on the complexion of the dead. Whereupon, perceiving what this meant, he studied ancient authors" (Laërtius). After twenty years the disciple of other philosophers and now firmly indoctrinated in the study of philosophy, Zeno began his own teachings. He began his instructions inside the colonnade of the Agora of Athens, originally known as the Porch of Peisianax in 301 B.C.

The Agora, or meeting place, of Athens was commonly referred to as the Stoa Poikile (Στοὰ Ποικίλη), deriving the very title the followers of Stoicism claim, Stoics, as previously they were referred to as Zenonians. Although many would come to congregate within the Stoa Poikile, the established poets who had previously claimed the title of Stoics would only end up furthering the popularity of the term and indirectly the philosophy of Stoicism. Zeno's teachings here inevitably leave great impressions upon the city of Athens, shaping much of western philosophy. Before Zeno's time came he became widely respected amongst the highest of social circles, especially within Athens, where he was honored with the keys to the city walls, a golden crown, and adorned in the shape of a bronze statue as an ornament of the city. Zeno's death is debated in small details but remembered most reliably by Laërtius to be,

> As he was leaving the school he tripped and fell, break a toe. Striking the ground with his fist he quoted the line from the "Niobe": "I come, I come, why dost thou call for me?" (Laërtius) and died on the spot through holding his breath. The year was 264 B.C. when the epitaph of Zeno the Stoic was writ with admiration and etched with the words, "Here lies great Zeno, dear to Citium, who scaled high Olympus, though he piled not Pelion on Ossa, nor toiled at the labours of Heracles, but this was the path he found out to the stars - the way of temperance alone (Laërtius).

His established respect remained intact, reflecting his philosophy of Stoicism to the very moments of his untimely death. Leaving behind his teachings and wisdom to guide brilliant minds and shape even the great city of Rome through Marcus Aurelius' devotion to Stoicism.

This way of temperance or Stoic philosophic doctrine is separated into three categories: the logical, the physical, and lastly the ethical. In this order Zeno taught his students of Stoicism and their defining attributes as he penned them within in his treatise *Exposition of Doctrine*.

Stoicism was inevitably succeeded by Cleanthes of Assos and eventually Chrysippus of Soloi, the latter of which is known as the second founder of the school of stoicism. Much of what is taught of Stoicism in contemporary philosophy is in regards to Chrysippus' systematization of Stoic doctrine and his re-tellings of his mentor Zeno. A great portion of Stoic teachings are in thanks to Cleanthes as well, due to his pursuit of expanding the Stoic doctrine into six separate parts as opposed to the original three. Altogether, the philosophical categories of Stoicism were summarized in a simile such as, "Philosophy, they say, is like an animal, Logic corresponding to the bones and sinews, Ethics to the fleshy parts, Physics to the soul" (Laërtius), or to a mighty city of which is considered physics, strongly walled by logic, and governed by reason or the ethics.

The very term "logic" is believed to have been coined by Zeno himself, as per Edward Zeller's publication, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, wherein he describes Zeno's division of logic into two divides, rhetoric and dialectic. The former is described as the art of persuasive speech or writing, in which arguments are invented, and they study the expression, arrangement, and delivery of the spoken word. While dialectic, is divided into the theory of the sign and the thing signified, as well as the theory of criteria and definitions, although the two latter categories are considered by some Stoics as an independent science to be studied in itself. The theory of the sign within dialectic is most commonly distinguished by its inclusion of poetry, musical theory, and grammar. These Stoic studies directly contributed to the development of Alexandrian and Roman civilization hundreds of years later, solidifying their importance through history. The theory of the thing signified though, most closely coincides with our contemporary teachings of formal logic as well as the Stoic theory of knowledge. Stoicism's theory of knowledge is in direct contrast to great philosophers that have come before Zeno, such as Plato

and Aristotle, who instead believed in the transcendental universal and the concrete universal respectively. The Stoic's instead embraced empiricism, the belief that knowledge comes primarily from our sensory experiences or "that all knowledge must proceed from perception of the particular" (Zeller). The particular in this case is described as the object in question, of which there are many within this world and so follows much to be learned. "According to the Stoic doctrine the soul at birth is like a clean tablet [or tabula rasa]" (Zeller), we must receive all of our knowledge through the impressions of the world and the objects therein imprint upon our souls. While retaining their conceptualisation as "sensualists" they also maintained an ideology of rationalism which is rarely paired with an empirical approach to philosophy.

This mindset of rationality supports the whole of Stoicism with their assertion of reason as "a product of development, in that it grows up gradually out of perceptions and is formed only about the fourteenth year" (Copleston). The ideas of which we conclude upon with our utilization of reason are considered in two types, deliberately formed general ideas and general ideas. These general ideas are specifically separated from the definition of "deliberately formed" as they are instead considered as virtually inherent ideas. Concisely stated, we have a natural predisposition to come to some conclusions as opposed to letting logical reasoning ultimately guide our decisions. Zeno in turn firmly held that only through reason could we come to a true understanding of the reality and universe that we inhabit. It is said that we use reason to "apprehend the conclusions of demonstration, for instance the existence of gods and their providence" (Laërtius), this is in contrast to our sensory abilities, in which we regard measurable observations such as colors and textures. We use our reason, then, to deduce propositions such as why or how, instead of simply what or when. These divisions of the rational and irrational are of vital consequence to the commonly regarded wise man, or perfect moral life of which the Stoics

believed not even themselves to have achieved nor anyone before them, with little hope that one may exist with time to come. As "without the study of dialectic, they say, the wise man cannot guard himself in argument so as never to fall; for it enables him to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to discriminate what is merely plausible and what is ambiguously expressed, and without it he cannot methodically put questions and give answers" (Laërtius). Therefore, without reason the wise man cannot truly live an ethical existence by the Stoic doctrine. For a life of over hastiness cannot be free from precipitancy or succumbing to the irrational assent of impressions upon on one's mind.

In an effort to rationalize our physical universe, logic grants us the ability to describe our surroundings as efficiently and semantically as possible as well as eloquently laying forth the reasonable grounds our minds are able conceive moral conclusions. Zeno follows this pursuit of logic in his treatise *On Existence,* with the study of Physics, as it is one of the fundamental reasons as to the importance of developing one's logic. Naturally, the entire physical doctrine can be divided into five entities: about bodies, principles, elements, the gods, about bounding surfaces, and space, whether filled or empty. Although, Zeno's personal preference in the divide is made between, the universe, the elements, and the subject of causation (Laërtius). The universe itself and the elements therein are the concerns of Stoic mathematicians, involving the investigation of the celestial bodies and heavenly stars in regards to their relative orbits, magnitude, and brilliance. Within the physical doctrine, the mathematicians subsequently claimed the examination of our ability of vision as well, describing everything from the magnificence of rainbows and halos to the providential occurrence of thunder and lightning.

The Stoics delved to great depths in order describe our physical world as rationally as possible, in so far as to abide by their materialism and monistic philosophy. They truly questioned

everything, including the very possibility of our world's beginning, its eventual downfall, and the matter of which all things worldly and celestial are comprised of.

Stoicism's investigation of reality's physical phenomena holds that all things are separated between two principles, of which they are merely two parts of a greater whole, defined to be the active and passive principle. The passive principle is that of material substance, or matter, with the defining principle as a corporeal object devoid of qualities and susceptible to both motion and modification. The qualities all corporeal entities reflect therefore, are derived from the rational force that permeates it, the active principle. These qualities are described variously from the "air-currents which are diffused throughout them and impart to them the tension which holds them together" (Zeller) to "the reason that is inherent in this substance, that is God" (Laërtius). Rightfully following, Zeno regarded all corporeal bodies within the world to be the work of reason and as such, absolute reason to be the very foundation of reality, declaring everything save the soul, taken by itself, to be without qualities.

For all things to reflect the active principle and the active principle itself to be described as God, Reason, Fate, or Zeus, it logically follows that:

> Natural beauty or finality in Nature point to the existence of a principle of thought in the universe, God, Who, in His Providence, has arranged everything for the good of man. Moreover, since the highest phenomenon of nature, man, is possessed of consciousness, we cannot suppose that the whole world is devoid of consciousness, for the whole cannot be less perfect than the part. God, therefore, is the Consciousness of the world. Nevertheless God, like the substance on which He works, is material. (Copleston)

Describing Zeus as both material and consciousness, Zeno acquires recourse from Heraclitus and his doctrine of the Logos, or reason, wherein he describes the universe's primal source to be the

active or Primordial Fire. From Zeno's treatise *On the Whole*, he describes the creation of our physical universe by the Primordial Fire with the creation of the four elements in the explicit order of fire, water, air, and finally earth. The elements themselves are "defined as that from which particular things first come to be at their birth and into which they are finally resolved" (Laërtius), with fire sustaining the highest pedestal of our reality's elemental constituents it is commonly referred to by the Stoics as the universe's "aether". The Stoics retain their philosophy of materialism with their consideration of God as an elemental form of the universe, while still maintaining the Divine Fire as the rational element that governs all reality. Zeno extrapolates two absolutes from this, believing that which follows firstly is a purpose to the universe and life, therefore implying inherent beauty, order, and harmony by design. Secondly, if God governs reality with reason, then we follow the absolute law of reason and therefore live according to law as opposed to lawlessness. The government of an unconditional law of reason then subjects the universe to the ultimatum of cause and effect, proving fate to be a necessity among Stoicism.

Although reality's components are all of one entity and ordered by reason and providence, Zeno did not consider them all equal, instead reason is believed to be imparted in degrees. One form of reason within our world acts as a simple "hold", or infrastructure, retaining the solidity of objects such as our bones and sinews, while the other form of reason manifests itself as intelligence. The intelligence of beings are the very ruling parts of our souls and when that same logic is extrapolated to regard the whole world, it is described as a "living being, endowed with soul and reason, and having aether for its ruling principle" (Laërtius). These collective principles of our physical world are regarded as secondary only to the priority of ethics by the teachings of Zeno. The true practicality of physics is necessary for the wise man to understand his role as the rational social animal of nature and with this understanding come to

complete terms as to the true nature of reason and its derivation. The wise man cannot live ethically without first obtaining the knowledge of how to live rationally. This understanding comes from the consideration of the Primordial Fire residing within each human's soul, acting collectively as the divine whole. For eventually the Stoics believe this fated universe to be circular, as "God forms the world and then takes it back into Himself through a universal conflagration, so that there is an unending series of world-constructions and world-destructions… each new world [resembling] its predecessor in all particulars" (Copleston).

With the conceptual understanding of both the wise man's necessity of logic and physics' supremacy over reality, the Stoics described "three kinds of life, the contemplative, the practical, and the rational, [declaring] that we ought to choose the last, for that a rational being is expressly produced by nature for contemplation and for action" (Laërtius). With that, Zeno set out to contemplate and establish an ethical doctrine of Stoicism in his treatise, *On the Nature of Man*. Although it is common for pleasure to be regarded as an animal or person's first impulse in life, Zeno disagreed, instead asserting "that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it" (Laërtius). In short, self-preservation is the endearing primary impulse of people and through such understanding comes the rational foundation of value. For when we value our lives first, we can come to understand its true meaning and can conclude that only what is rational and reasonable can have value. This correlates directly to the value of virtues, which the Stoics regarded as "only virtue is a good for them, it is only in virtue that their happiness can consist, which is therefore affected by no further conditions" (Zeller). Zeno continues with this concept of impulse by describing its worth as Nature's guiding rule to follow its most basic impulses. What follows is Zeno's designation as to the end, or meaning, of life as, "life in agreement with nature"

"virtue being the goal towards which nature guides us" (Laërtius). A life lived in accordance with nature is therefore a life abiding by virtue and reason, the very nature of the universe itself.

Virtue was held by Zeno to be a "harmonious disposition, choice-worthy for its own sake and not from hope or fear or any external motive. Moreover, it is in virtue that happiness consists; for virtue is the state of mind which tends to make the whole of life harmonious" (Laërtius). We consciously are then aware of the universe's natural tendency towards virtue whether non-intellectual or intellectual and our consent to these moral laws as rational beings. As a result, everything save virtue, such as health, pleasures, and possessions are not goods nor is death, poverty, or disease considered evils. For the Stoics believed everything to be indifferent if not a virtue or vice and virtue alone the condition for true happiness. Zeno therefore considered virtue to be the only thing desired in itself and to be sought after as the one true good, for "the real happiness of the virtuous man [is] predominantly in freedom from disturbance, tranquillity, and inward independence" (Zeller). To achieve this inner tranquility, the wise man must then maintain indifference towards pleasures and instead must choose for himself the higher values and disregard the lower.

The concept of virtues were then decided upon by Zeno and determined to be divided between primary and subordinate virtues. He began with the cardinal virtues and considered only a select few traits, counting wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance among those to be desired. Wisdom specifically was defined by the Stoic's as the knowledge of good and evil and the separation of what is neither good nor evil; granting the wise man the ability to choose what he ought to do, what he should be most wary of, and the great many indifferences within the world. Similarly, vices are separated between primary and subordinate with injustice, cowardice, profligacy, and folly as the former, while stupidity, incontinence, and ill-advisedness the latter.

Altogether, vices are considered simply as forms of ignorance, whereas virtues are the corresponding forms of knowledge the unvirtuous lack. The wise man will come to exude all virtues, while exhibiting no form of ignorance.

The truly peculiar characteristic of virtue within Stoicism is its form within one's character, as the wise man alone performs his fulfilment of duty, or virtuous conduct, in the right spirit, for he is without passions or the temptation of pleasures. What follows is Zeno's determination that either man is completely virtuous or not virtuous at all, there are no degrees of a virtuous life. By consequence, Zeno considered no one, not even himself, to be a truly wise man and that very few ever rightfully attain virtue, for "man walks in wickedness all his life, or at any rate, for the greater part of it. If he ever attains to virtue, it is late and at the very sunset of his days" (Copleston). The corresponding division of mankind is then made between fools and those who have dedicated their lives towards the progression of personal virtue and wisdom. The great Stoics themselves hesitated to claim even their lives as one of perfect virtue and wisdom, although Zeno had considered Socrates to have been the pinnacle of moral achievement within one lifetime thus far, never attaining the status of the wise man though.

Stoicism's defining factors of living with the pursuit of virtue and wisdom is rooted in one's discipline of passions and affections. These afflicting affections are regarded as "pleasure, sorrow or depression, desire, and fear are irrational and unnatural; and so it is not so much a question of moderating and regulating them as of getting rid of them and inducing a state of apathy" (Copleston). Zeno continues his ethical doctrine by classifying all passions between virtue, vice, and the indifferent, this final category of notable importance. With the consideration of the vast majority of things as indifferent to one's ability in gaining virtue, it is then distinguished between three categories, "those which are in accordance with nature and therefore

have a value, are desirable and are to be preferred for themselves alone; those which are contrary to nature and consequently have no value and are to be avoided; and finally those which have neither value nor its opposite, the "adiaphora" in a narrow sense" (Zeller). Altogether, the wise man must have extraordinary moderation in his life to attain true virtue by way of apathy towards passion and affection.

Zeno's treatise *On the Passions*, defines passion and emotion as "an irrational and unnatural movement in the soul, or again as impulse in excess" (Laërtius), wherein constituting the most universal emotions as pleasure, grief, desire, and fear. More specifically, pleasure is described as the irrational euphoria that accrues by way of what is deemed choiceworthy or pleasurable. While grief was determined to be merely an "irrational mental contraction" (Laërtius), similarly fear as simply the irrational expectation of evil within one's life. Finally desire or craving is considered to be an "irrational appetency" (Laërtius), under which many of our most basic feelings derive, such as contentiousness, love, and hatred. Subsequently, there are but three emotional states considered good by the Stoics, of which they are, wishing, caution, and joy. Joy is considered the rational elation of a wise man, not to be mistaken with pleasure, while caution is the rational counterpart of fear in so far as to avoid befalling tragedy. Finally, wishing is deemed the benevolence of friendliness and the respectful well-wishing of others, altogether completing the wise man's refined characteristics.

Collectively, with the select traits the wise man must emulate defined, the apathy he must have for all things indifferent, and the extirpation of all things deemed vicious, Zeno concludes the righteous path of which a man must abide by to live a life epitomizing virtue and in accordance with nature. As tidy and complete as this may seem as it is presented, the Old Stoa were quite aware of contradictions within their doctrine. With the consideration of living a life of

reason and virtue, and by extension according to nature, the Stoics must emulate nature itself, but to what extent is the decisive quandary. For nature does not want, it has no plans, and for that matter no consciousness, while man would find it quite improbable to exist without such definitions. So to live in absolute accordance with Nature, the Stoics may need to refer to their roots of Cynicism and their ascetic lifestyles, although the Old Stoa certainly do not follow such a course. To live a life without goals or plans seems equally as preposterous, for how is a fool expected to seek out the knowledge of the Stoic doctrine in an attempt to enlighten oneself of the ways of the wise man. Moreover, regardless of the Stoics classification of Nature as God, they do not consider it conscious nor exhibiting a form of volition, in turn defining a separation between ourselves in Nature. This should not be confused as a separation of entity for we can still consider ourselves to be a part of the greater whole that is the universe. Although, our ability to conceivably exhibit the faculty of will does not coincide with Nature and so we must then understand our lives may not conform to Nature as seamlessly as the Old Stoa would like to believe. To live a life in accordance with Nature may even bring to light our perplexing ability, or compulsion, to speak, while Nature does not hold such a capacity by the knowledge of the Stoics. With such considerations presented it quickly becomes apparent that living a life in accordance with Nature becomes perplexing and arduous.

Naturally what follows life is death and is itself a topic of deliberation among the Stoic, for the Ancient Greek culture deemed it not only widely acceptable but honorable under the correct circumstances. It is was perpetuated false belief that honorable suicide is a Stoic notion, but it was in fact a part of Greek culture long before the Stoics, hence Plato and Aristotle's opinions on the matter. In regards to the Stoics, the conflict was between the wise man and the fool. As with all acts the Stoics believed the act in itself unimportant, instead shifting focus onto

the intentions of suicide. John Rist cites Laërtius's account of the Stoic doctrine quoting the following reasons on the rationality of suicide: "on behalf of his country, or his friends, or if he is afflicted by intolerable pain or an incurable disease" (Rist). This cannot be taken wholeheartedly though as the Stoics would not condone suicide at the first inclination of pain or disease, for they make the distinction that death itself must be in accordance with Nature just as life is. In this notion they consider "the theme that god may send such orders [of suicide] to the individual by *divina auctoritas* [(divine authority)]" (Rist), revealing a widely debated reason as to Zeno's own suicide, for "he thought he had received a sign that his hour had come" (Rist). What naturally follows such a claim is one's ability to decipher God's calling to such an occasion, specifically in regards to the Stoics belief that only the wise man truly understands Nature and so how can Zeno claim to have made the correct decision for he did not consider himself wise, or any fool for that matter.

By the Old Stoa, a fool is not believed to be able to rationally justify taking his own life for he does not recognize Nature's true constitution, while the wise the man may be able to do precisely that, how can suicide truly be considered natural if nothing within Nature commits suicide besides man. The contradiction is therefore between the wise man's obligation to commit suicide when the divine providence calls and the seemingly unnatural act in doing so. Additionally, the concept that a wise man's life must inevitably come to an end by God's calling due in part to his unnecessary continuance upon Earth and supposed inability to contribute anything further by his existence is confounding when considering the fool in the same light, with no eventual demise of worth in life. It is conceivable that the fool will always retain the ability to ascertain virtue by way of Nature until his last fleeting moments and so will never receive the Divine Fire's requisition. Unfortunately Zeno's writings are of course scarce and his

precise thoughts on the matter have been lost while the famed Stoic successors' writings on suicide conflict with one another in subtleties, all of which require intricate assumptions to ascertain a full model of suicide and its conformity with Nature. Regardless of conflicting opinions and admittable contradictions the respected doctrine of Zeno's Stoicism is a beautiful ethical discipline and holds a perspective of enlightenment the study of ethics will continue to hold in high regards.

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